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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DAKAR 001416

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, INL
EUCOM PASS TO AFRICOM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PU](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU ENTERING PERIOD OF VOLATILITY
FOLLOWING ATTACK ON PRESIDENT VIEIRA

REF: DAKAR 1365

Classified By: Ambassador Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 B/D.

Summary and Introduction

11. (C) Summary: Many aspects of the November 23 attack on Guinea-Bissau's President, Joao Bernardo Vieira, remain unclear. According to the official account, the President narrowly escaped an attempted assassination as a prelude to a coup d'etat, which he survived due to the intervention of loyal elements in the armed forces. However, this is not exactly the version of events subscribed to by various senior political figures and observers during the Political Counselor's November 24-26 visit to Bissau.

12. (C) The capital is rife with rumors that the event was staged by President Vieira or by Vieira in concert with the chief of staff or that, at a minimum, the president knew the attack was imminent and was not at home, as he claims officially. It is clear, however, that the country's fragile democracy is at risk from a combination of the jockeying for power between the current president, former President Kumba Yala, the Army Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai, former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes, Jr., the slowly growing ethnic tension between the Balanta military elite and the rest of the country's largely non-Balanta ruling class, and the malevolent influence of drug traffickers.

13. (C) As of December 5, the investigation into the attack was ongoing. The suspected leader of the insurgents, navy sergeant Alexandre Tchama Yala, according to press reports was captured in Dakar on December 3. Against this backdrop, the country waits to see if the president will nominate his personal enemy, Gomes, as prime minister after Gomes's party's resounding victory in the November 16 legislative elections. End Summary.

Something Does Not Add Up

14. (SBU) One day after the attack on President Vieira's house, Bissau was uncannily calm. There was no heightened security evident in the city. There were no more police or military personnel in the streets than usual and the street of the President's house, while off-limits to car traffic, was not off-limits to pedestrian traffic. A meeting of the Council of Ministers was held without any extra security, according to the UN Secretary General's Representative (RSG,) Shola Omoregie.

¶5. (SBU) As reported reftel, on the night of the assault on the President's house, General Na Wai could not be reached because he was allegedly ill. However, Political Counselor saw General Na Wai on the balcony of his Staff Headquarters just before he drove off, after having canceled a scheduled meeting with the Political Counselor at the last minute. The General appeared to be healthy.

¶6. (C) According to the RSG, Attorney General Luis Manuel Cabral, the Portuguese First Secretary and Colonel M. Camara, military adviser to the Minister of Defense, there was a noticeable and significant delay before troops were sent to the aide of President Vieira. In fact, the RSG reported that the Portuguese Ambassador was moved to contact the Minister of Interior to urge that the Public Order Police (POP) be sent to aide the president.

¶7. (C) When asked about the inexplicable delay in sending troops to reinforce Vieira's guard force during the assault on his residence, General Na Wai told the RSG, "If the military had been involved in the attack on the President, it would have been successful," but refused or was unable to explain how or why it took more than an hour, perhaps as long as two, for military forces to be sent to the president's aid.

Vieira Was Not Home

¶8. (C) President Vieira officially claims to have been home

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¶9. (C) Cabral told Political Counselor that General Na Wai was not being cooperative in the investigation into the events of November 23. He said that Na Wai refused to hand over the suspects in military custody, in spite of the Minister of Justice and Cabral's insistence that this crime is covered under civilian criminal law. According to Cabral, a source he trusts informed him that while Na Wai claimed to have only five prisoners, in reality he was holding 18 men in custody. (Note: According to the Bissau-Guinean Ambassador to Senegal, seven suspects had been turned over to the police as of December 8. End note.)

A Commission Established to Oversee Investigation

¶10. (C) Prime Minister Carlos Correira has established a commission chaired by him and consisting of the Ministers of Justice, Defense, Public Administration, Finance, Interior, and the Attorney General to oversee the investigation into the attack. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General both opposed the creation of the commission. Minister of Justice Pires said it was unnecessary, insisting that the law was clear that the assassination attempt was a "common crime" to be investigated and prosecuted by civilian law enforcement and attorneys. Both she and Attorney General Cabral described the commission as a form of foot dragging -- or obstruction, noting wryly that previous commissions of this nature never came to any conclusions when investigating earlier alleged political assassinations.

Non-Balanta Leaders Blame the Balanta for Attack

¶11. (C) Several non-Balanta officials -- including Minister of Justice Carmelita Pires, who is descended from Cape Verde parentage, Attorney General Cabral (who is of the Pepel ethnic group) and the Minister of Defense Marciano Silva Pereira Barbeiro (who is Majaco) -- placed the blame for these events squarely at the feet of the Balanta military elite. In separate meetings with Political Counselor, Attorney General Cabral and Minister Pires were particularly emphatic about this point, Stressing that "one ethnic group" is responsible for the situation. Cabral went on to say that Balanta military officers "only respect the United States,"

urging that the USG put pressure on the military.

¶12. (C) MOD Adviser Colonel Camara told Political Counselor that the instability facing Guinea-Bissau was largely a result of the fear of the Balanta military elite vis--vis security sector reform. Camara, who fought in the independence war at the age of 16 and subsequently was educated in Lisbon and the Soviet Union, said, "I have colleagues who are colonels and who are illiterate. They don't trust security sector reform because there is nothing they can do outside of the military." He said that the Balanta did not have much power in Bissau before the Balanta-ization of the armed forces by former President Yala and were fearful of losing the power their dominance of the armed forces gives them. Camara went on to say that he was not completely trusted by his Balanta colleagues because, while his mother is Balanta, his father is Mandinke. (Note: According to LES staff, he is also known as a President Vieira loyalist. End note.)

Former President Yala Contests Election Results

¶13. (C) Former President Yala's party, the Party for Social

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Renewal (PRS), has protested against what they regard as the disrespectful and abusive treatment of their leader. On November 21 more than two dozen police officers were dispatched to issue a court summons to Yala who was in the stronghold of his party and his ethnic group, Bissora, for alleged slander of the president. (FYI - During the recent legislative campaign, Yala accused Vieira of being the "biggest drug trafficker in Guinea-Bissau." End FYI) There are reports that Yala's passport was taken from him in advance of President Vieira bringing slander charges against him in court. PRS's First Vice President told Political Counselor that this treatment was completely unacceptable.

¶14. (C) During a November 24 meeting of the diplomatic corps with the Foreign Minister, several ambassadors opined that the issuance of a summons at this time was reckless, according to RSG Omoregie, and might have been provoked the attack. At a minimum, the timing of the issuance of the summons is considered suspect because it was done on the day the provisional election results were announced -- results that were a crushing defeat for both Vieira and Yala -- and likely done to distract from the resounding PIAGC victory. As of December 8, PRS's complaint was being reviewed by the National Election Commission (CNE).

Drug Trafficking a Likely Element in the Attack

¶15. (C) According to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, the August abortive coup attempt and the November 23 attack are directly linked to the July seizure of a plane suspected of being used to transport cocaine. While the pilot and crew were released by a judge in spite of efforts by the Minister Justice and Attorney General to have the pilot expelled and placed into Mexican custody (where he is wanted on trafficking charges), both said their investigation of that incident was ongoing. According to them, fear of what their investigation might uncover was the motive for the attack, which they blamed on former President Yala and fugitive Navy Chief-of-Staff Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto who is allegedly under house arrest in the Gambia. However, according to UN Political Officer Rasul, Admiral Na Tchuto is "Vieira's man and the two are in regular contact by phone. Bubo calls Nino (Vieira) and Nino calls Bubo."

Comment: This Isn't Over

¶16. (C) Comment: Guinea-Bissau is entering yet another precarious period in its fragile democracy. If President

Vieira dramatized the events of the failed attempt on his life to enhance his political stature in advance of forming a new government, the tactic has been arguably)- if temporarily -- successful: almost all political leaders in the country and the international community have expressed support for him as the duly elected president. However, this does not obscure the fact that he has suffered a devastating blow as a result of the PAIGC victory in the legislative elections. By all accounts, Vieira had hoped his party, the Republican Party for Independence Development (PRID), and PRS would win at least enough support to prevent PAIGC from winning an absolute majority (67 out 100 National Assembly seats).

¶17. (C) The two-thirds majority would give a PAIGC prime minister complete legislative power and, as PAIGC President, Carlos Gomes, Jr. expects to be named prime minister. He spoke out during the campaign against the notion of a "presidential system," and observers believe he is likely to try to reduce the role and constitutional powers of the president. Vieira does not want to be reduced to being a figurehead chief of state. Adding to the tension, the two men are widely regarded as protagonists stemming from a land dispute. Some therefore believe that Vieira might name another PAIGC leader prime minister instead of Gomes. He is not constitutionally obligated to choose the majority party's leader; he is only obliged "to take into account the election results and views of the National Assembly." (FYI - By tradition, the majority party or coalition provides the president with three names from which he chooses. PAIGC, however, is balking at the idea of providing the president any name other than that of Gomes. End FYI)

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General Na Wai,s Role Potentially Troubling

¶18. (C) Chief of Staff Na Wai's role in the attack is suspect. While it does not appear he had a hand in planning the attack, his slow response suggests that, while he might not have had an interest in assassinating the president, he might not have been averse to someone else doing so. Otherwise, a renegade group of soldiers able to mount a credible attack exposed the limits of Na Wai's control over his own forces, which, if true, is equally disturbing. The proposed reform of the security sector and increased international effort to tackle Guinea Bissau's drug problem are placing enormous pressure on the people Na Wai cares most about - his fellow Balanta soldiers. Nor would a reformed military have a place for an illiterate chief of staff.

¶19. (C) In the interim, counter-narcotics efforts will diminish the drug money he uses to maintain a hold on the military, and could even put him in danger of being charged with a crime at some point. In the short term, Na Wai's position has likely been solidified because he has secured President Vieira's position. Vieira cannot dismiss Na Wai (presuming Na Wai would accept to go, which by all accounts he would not) without dividing military and engendering its distrust. The attack suggests there are elements that will do anything they can to derail security sector reform and thwart counter-narcotics efforts, and have, however inadvertently, demonstrated Yala's continued influence as unofficial leader of the Balanta people.

Comment: Gomes Not Safe

¶20. (C) Gomes is the political figure most at risk at this time. As a former businessman, he is the only key player with no support in the military. He is considered a proponent of security sector reform and counter-narcotics and is a foe of Vieira, Yala, and Na Wai. RSG Omoregie has urged Gomes to get good security and told Political Counselor the international community should train some form of protective force for him should he be appointed as prime minister.

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